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# TTY Use and “Helpful Hints”

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## General Background

TTYs are communications devices that do not use voice, but have keyboards (just like a typewriter) and visual displays for text-based conversations. While TTYs are used primarily by Deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, or Deaf-Blind individuals, some individuals with disabilities that affect their ability to produce clear speech also use TTYs.

## English Skills of TTY Users

Deaf TTY users have a broad range of English skills. For many Deaf individuals, English is their second language. As for anyone for whom English is a second language, he or she may use what seem to be awkward phrases, misspell words (though anyone is capable of a “typo”), or “telegraph” thoughts and ideas without using standard English grammar, syntax, or sentence structure. Take care to be respectful and try to use language that the caller will be able to understand – “simplified English.” Just as translating from French to Spanish presents unique challenges, American Sign Language (“ASL,” visual) and English (print, spoken) are not the same languages.

## TTY Etiquette

Here are some basic rules of “etiquette” for TTY communication, in no order of importance, stated briefly. Following is a more complete explanation of each.

1. Greet a TTY caller the same as you would a voice caller; be sure to include your name.
2. Take turns and do not interrupt the other person (unless there is an emergency).
3. If you are interrupted by a customer or co-worker during your TTY conversation, type “pls hd” which means “please hold.”
4. When providing a lot of information, take breaks, allowing the caller to ask questions or comment.
5. Use abbreviations that can be clearly understood in the context of the conversation and use common TTY abbreviations.
6. Don’t worry about spelling errors if your meaning is clear within the context.
7. Don’t worry about grammatical punctuation (such as upper/lower case, periods or commas – simply put a few spaces in between sentences).
8. Spell out numbers.

9. If you make a spelling or other error that may result in confusion or incorrect details being relayed, don't backspace and correct ... simply type "xx" then re-start the word or phrase.
10. Inflections. Insert words such as "smile" or "grin" or "sigh" to indicate attitude.
11. When you've reached an ending point for the conversation, you may type "GA to SK" ["Go Ahead, (I am ready) to Stop Keying"] to indicate to the other person you are finished and ready to end the conversation.

## **Additional Information on Rules of Etiquette**

**1. Greet a TTY caller the same as you would a voice caller; be sure and include your name.** Answer the call with the same information you would a voice call – "Office of Civil Rights. This is [your name]. How may I help you?" ... or whatever your office typically uses. Sometimes when people are uncomfortable with using TTYs and/or their typing may take longer, they will modify and/or abbreviate their usual greeting.

**2. Take turns and do not interrupt the other person (unless there is an emergency).** Always let the other person complete what he or she would like to say, after which "GA" (which means "Go Ahead") will appear on the TTY display. To start typing or to interrupt before the person has typed "GA" is considered rude or disrespectful. When you see "GA," it is your turn to type. Remember to type "GA" when you're finished, so the other person knows to respond. This is similar to "over and out" or simply "out" when communicating by radio; it's a cue that it's the other person's turn.

**3. If you are interrupted by a customer or co-worker during your TTY conversation, type "pls hd" which means "please hold."** Don't just stop typing when interrupted, leaving the TTY caller wondering where you are. Type "Pls Hd" or "Please Hold" to let the other person know you need to take a break from the conversation. If you like, you may even type, "Pls Hd ... Someone in our office needs help." When you've completed the other business, simply resume typing since it is still your turn in the conversation. You may prefer to tell the person who wants to interrupt that you are on a TTY call, and ask him/her to please wait until the call is finished. If you are interrupted while the caller is typing, hopefully you have a printer on the TTY and you may "catch up" on what was typed during the interruption.

While on a standard voice telephone call, the caller may hear the interruption taking place and your response to that interruption, or you might quickly say "just a minute." In hearing culture, this is acceptable etiquette. Via TTY, there is no way for the TTY user to know what's going on without you giving a cue.

**4. When providing a lot of information, take breaks, allow the caller to ask questions or comment.** Turn-taking is an important part of TTY calls. It can be frustrating in any conversation if one person goes on and on. In hearing culture, it is acceptable to jump in and express your question or ask for clarification. Since one of the rules of TTY etiquette is to avoid interrupting, it is good practice to be brief and

clear, breaking up information you are providing and allow for questions or comments by the caller along the way.

**5. Use abbreviations that can be clearly understood in the context of the conversation and commonly used TTY abbreviations.**

Commonly Used Abbreviations in TTY Conversations

ga	go ahead	q	question mark
u	you	cld or wld	could or would
r	are	lv	leave (so ... lv msg)
nbr	number	mtg	meeting
pls	please	hmm	thinking
hd	hold	tmw	tomorrow
msg	message	ha ha	laughter

**6. Don't worry about spelling errors if your meaning is clear within the context of the conversation.** If your meaning is clear, e.g., typing "new yirk" rather than "new york," don't worry about making any correction. If you are relaying important detailed information (name, address, telephone number, etc.), then simply type "xx" then restart the word or phrase. Particularly for individuals who have visual disabilities in addition to a hearing or speech disability, it can be difficult to "track" with the visual display. It is much simpler for you and easier for the other person to track if you continue typing, indicating an error with "xx" then restarting the word or phrase, etc.

**7. Don't worry about punctuation.** It is acceptable in TTY conversations to omit upper/lower case letters and to skip many types of punctuation. In part this is due to simple economy, ESL issues, and developed/accepted practices. If your TTY has a printout, you will notice that there is no upper/lower case within each person's part of the conversation. One person's text is in all lower case, and the other person's text is in all upper case. This makes it easier to follow the conversation on the resultant "tape."

**8. Spell out numbers.** Dependent upon the TTY you are using, it may have a keyboard that has separate keys for numbers, or you may need to use the "Shift" key to type numbers. Regardless, numbers can be difficult to read so many individuals prefer that you spell out numbers to ensure no misunderstandings. If you do choose to use numbers, follow up by spelling them out, for confirmation.

**9. If you make a spelling error or typo ... don't backspace to correct it.** Particularly for those who also have "low vision" and use a large visual display, tracking with text is difficult already. If you make a typo, simply type "xx" then restart the sentence or the word and continue your part of the conversation. And don't worry about everything being perfect (unless you are giving the person information that must be correct – name, telephone number, etc.). We all make typos, and many of them are close enough that the other person knows what we mean; typing "xx" and restarting may be more disruptive than helpful.

**10. Inflections.** With text-based communication, it can be difficult to indicate inflection or emotion, just as in e-mail messages. (How many of us have felt uncertain about an e-mailer's intent – terse, rude, serious or teasing us?) Via voice telephone conversations, you can “hear” a smile or laugh. Common in TTY conversations are typing expressions such as “smile” “ha” “grin” or “sigh.” Using these expressions, separated in the text by several spaces, allows you to personalize your conversation, provide cues about intent behind words, and help the other person feel more comfortable.

**11. When you've reached an ending point for the conversation, you may type “GA to SK” or “SK to GA”** which indicates “you may Go Ahead, I'm ready to Stop Keying (have nothing more to ask/say). At this point, the individual may say “Thanks for your help. Have a good day. SK” You may type, “Thank you. You too have a good day. SK” The other person will confirm the end of the conversation by simply repeating “SK.” If the person has another question, the conversation will continue. You'll need to “play it by ear,” just as you would a voice caller.

Dependent upon the caller, you may go back and forth a few times before you both finally type SK. This is an aspect of Deaf culture that needs to be recognized. Deaf callers are usually quite aware and respectful of hearing culture and they know offices can be busy places; in other words, often, they will modify their own TTY conversational practices to try to fit in with hearing culture/business world communication.

**One last note ... relax and don't worry about making mistakes or not doing everything outlined here exactly.** Every individual who uses a TTY has different skills and has a lot of experience communicating with hearing folks who are unaccustomed to using TTYs. As you would with anyone who contacts your office, do your best, be respectful and patient, and your TTY conversations will be effective.

### **About TeleBraille Users**

As noted above, deaf and fully blind users of TTYs use a Braille display version of a TTY called “TeleBraille.” A TeleBraille unit works just like a TTY, has a keyboard for input, but uses a Braille display for output (incoming information.) These conversations necessarily take more time because the person cannot simply read a visual display, but must “read” a Braille display on the device. For many TeleBraille users, reading Braille takes notably more time than for others to read a visual display.

**1. Type slower so the person can more easily keep up.** If you're already a slow typist, this may not be an issue. (Smile)

**2. You will need to wait for a TeleBraille user's response ... be patient.** Because the caller is using a Braille display, it will take him/her longer to read your part of the conversation – some individuals longer than others, dependent upon their Braille skills. You will notice “delays” in the caller responding to you. Simply wait; do not interrupt (which will be confusing) or type “are you there q “ or anything.

### **3. Keep in mind the same TTY rules of etiquette for TeleBraille calls.**

Because the call will take more time and using Braille takes more energy (and there's no print out which can later be referred to), using abbreviations, taking turns, and providing information with breaks to allow for questions and comments are even more important.

### **How to Alert Customers and Clients About Your TTY Availability**

If your department has a TTY, you should display a TTY number next to any voice telephone numbers in printed materials such as program brochures, event flyers, department reports, etc. The availability of TTY numbers can be identified by using "TTY" after the telephone number, or with this symbol:



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